AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for providing assurance that an electronic pseudonym belongs to a member of a particular organization, said method comprising the steps of:

    registering the organization with an authentication authority;

    distributing a membership token from the authentication authority to the organization;

    distributing the membership token to the member;

    registering the pseudonym with the authentication authority; and

    associating the pseudonym with the organization using the membership token to establish a relationship between the pseudonym and membership in the organization, thereby enabling a user of the pseudonym to communicate in an electronic forum or community as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from other participants in the electronic forum or community,

    wherein other participants in the electronic forum or community are able to validate that the user of the pseudonym is a member of the organization via the authentication authority,

    wherein the membership token is useable to establish the relationship between the pseudonym and membership in the organization for various electronic forums or communities, such that the user of the pseudonym is able to communicate as an authorized member of the organization across multiple electronic forums or communities.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the membership token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the membership token comprises an encoded identifier of the organization.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of associating the membership with the organization comprises the steps of receiving a log-in by a user on a computer system at the

authentication authority; verifying a permission of the user to manage the pseudonym; and receiving the membership token from the user.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4, further comprising the steps of retrieving an identification of the organization from a database comprising membership tokens and corresponding organizations.

6. (Original) The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of decoding the membership token to determine the identity of the organization to be associated with the pseudonym.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the membership token comprises an expiration date.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of verifying that the membership token has not expired before performing the step of associating the pseudonym with the organization.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the association of the pseudonym with the organization has an expiration period.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, further comprising the steps of notifying the member when the expiration period has passed.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the association of the pseudonym with the organization has an expiration date.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of notifying the member when the expiration date has passed.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of notifying the member prior to the expiration date being reached.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of receiving at the authentication authority a revocation notice from the organization and removing the association of the pseudonym with the organization according to the revocation notice.

15. (Currently Amended) A method for providing assurance that a document posted to an electronic forum by a user belonging to a particular organization, wherein the user posts the electronic document using a pseudonymous identity, said method comprising the steps of:

      registering the organization with an authentication authority;

      distributing a membership token from the authentication authority to the organization, in response to the step of registering the organization;

      receiving at the authentication authority a communication comprising the membership token and the pseudonymous identity, said communication being sent by the user;

      associating, at the authentication authority, the pseudonymous identity with the organization to establish a relationship between the pseudonym and membership in the organization, thereby enabling a user of the pseudonym to post documents in an electronic forum as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from other participants in the electronic forum;

      providing the user with a means for electronically signing the document using the pseudonymous identity;

      verifying that the document was electronically signed using the pseudonymous identity; and

      providing verification to a reader of the document that the pseudonymous identity is associated with the organization;

      wherein said membership token is useable to establish the relationship between the pseudonym and membership in the organization for various electronic forums, such that the user

is able to post documents as an authorized member of the organization across multiple electronic forums.

16. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the membership token comprises a unique string of alphabetical and numerical characters.

17. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the membership token comprises an encoded identifier of the organization.

18. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the organization comprises the steps of receiving a log-in by the user on a computer system at the authentication authority; verifying a permission of the user to manage the pseudonymous identity; and receiving the membership token from the user.

19. (Original) The method of claim 18, further comprising the steps of retrieving an identification of the organization from a database comprising membership tokens and corresponding organizations.

20. (Original) The method of claim 18, further comprising the step of decoding the membership token to determine the identity of the organization to be associated with the pseudonymous identity.

21. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the membership token comprises an expiration date.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising the step of verifying that the membership token has not expired before performing the step of associating the pseudonymous identity with the organization.

23. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the association of the pseudonymous identity with the organization has a pre-determined life-span.

24. (Original) The method of claim 23, further comprising the steps of notifying the pseudonymous identity when the pre-determined life-span has been exceeded.

25. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein the association of the pseudonymous identity with the organization has an expiration date.

26. (Original) The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of notifying the pseudonymous identity when the expiration date has passed.

27. (Original) The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of notifying the pseudonymous identity prior to the expiration date being reached.

28. (Original) The method of claim 15, further comprising the steps of receiving at the authentication authority a revocation notice from the organization and removing the association of the pseudonymous identity with the organization according to the revocation notice.

29. – 52. (Cancelled)

53. (Currently Amended) An authentication authority for providing assurance that an electronic pseudonym belongs to a member of a particular organization, said authentication authority comprising:

        a database of registered organizations;

        a database of membership tokens assigned to each registered organization; and

        a database of associations between electronic pseudonyms and registered organizations,

        wherein the database of associations between electronic pseudonyms and organizations is populated when the authentication authority receives a communication comprising a membership

token and an electronic pseudonym <u>to establish a relationship between the pseudonym and</u>
<u>membership in the organization, thereby enabling a user of the pseudonym to communicate in an</u>
<u>electronic forum or community as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the</u>
<u>user's identity from other participants in the electronic forum or community,</u>

<u>wherein other participants in the electronic forum or community are able to validate that</u>
<u>the user of the pseudonym is a member of the organization via the authentication authority,</u>

<u>wherein the membership token is useable to establish the relationship between the</u>
<u>pseudonym and membership in the organization for various electronic forums or communities,</u>
<u>such that the user of the pseudonym is able to communicate as an authorized member of the</u>
<u>organization across multiple electronic forums or communities.</u>

54. (Original) The authentication authority of claim 53, wherein the particular organization comprises a plurality of voters registered by an election authority.

55. (Original) The authentication authority of claim 53, wherein the authentication authority further comprises an electronic dating service and wherein the particular organization comprises a plurality of people sharing a common trait.

56. (Original) The authentication authority of claim 53, further comprising programming logic for distributing a membership token to an organization when the organization registers with the authentication authority.

57. (Currently Amended) A system for providing assurance that a document posted to an electronic forum by a user belonging to a particular organization, wherein the user posts the electronic document using a pseudonym, said system comprising:

a computer system comprising a memory and a processor;

a database comprising registered organizations, registered pseudonyms, and membership tokens;

a means for distributing a membership token from the computer system to an organization;

a means for the computer system to receive a communication comprising the membership token and the pseudonym, said communication being sent from the user;

a means for associating the pseudonym with the organization in the database to establish a relationship between the pseudonym and membership in the organization, thereby enabling a user of the pseudonym to post documents in an electronic forum as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from other participants in the electronic forum;

a means for electronically signing the document with the pseudonym;

a means for verifying that the document was electronically signed with the pseudonym; and

a means for providing verification to a reader of the document that the pseudonym is associated with the organization;

wherein said membership token is useable to establish the relationship between the pseudonym and membership in the organization for various electronic forums, such that the user is able to post documents as an authorized member of the organization across multiple electronic forums.

58. (New) The method according to claim 1, wherein said step of associating enables the user of the pseudonym to communicate in the electronic forum or community as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from the organization.

59. (New) The method according to claim 1, wherein another participant in the electronic forum or community validates that the user of the pseudonym is a member of the organization by sending a verification request to the authentication authority.

60. (New) The method according to claim 15, wherein said step of associating enables the user of the pseudonym to post documents in the electronic forum as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from the organization.

61. (New) The authentication authority of claim 53, wherein said database of associations between electronic pseudonyms and registered organizations enables the user of the pseudonym to communicate in the electronic forum or community as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from the organization.

62. (New) The authentication authority according to claim 53, wherein another participant in the electronic forum or community validates that the user of the pseudonym is a member of the organization by sending a verification request to said authentication authority.

63. (New) The system according the claim 57, wherein said system enables the user of the pseudonym to post documents in the electronic form as an authorized member of the organization while protecting the user's identity from the organization.